For copyright reasons, the frontispiece and all other illustrations in this volume have been blacked out. We are in the process of applying for permission to reproduce these illustrations electronically. Once permission is gained, the illustrations will be made available. We apologize for the inconvenience.

# Engakuji and Kenchōji: Reflections on the Social Morphology of Two Kamakura Temples

A. W. SADLER

THE anthropological and sociological examination of social patterns and social forms represents a relatively new departure in the human quest for self-understanding. I say new, because the sociological-anthropological venture is very much a phenomenon of the latter part of the period of European expansion and colonialism (the days when the sun never set on the Union Jack), and a potential bridge into the present era, which many of us think is, or ought to be, a post-colonial period. Perhaps it is no coincidence that, as the idealisms of the post-colonial period are now so sorely tested around the world, the sociological venture seems also to face deterioration at the hands of the survey-takers, the *soroban* sociologists.

But the attempt to understand the *forms* that emerge when men live in community with one another, and to arrive at this understanding by means of a distinctive discipline, began around the turn of the century, and flourished up to the time of the great European war between the English, the French, and the Germans which reached its temporary stalemate in 1918. The beginnings of the discipline might be traced to the publication, in 1899, of Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss' "Essai sur la Nature et la Fonction du Sacrifice"; or Mauss and Durkheim's "De Quelques Formes Primitives de Classification" in 1903; or Max Weber's "Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus" in 1904 and 1905. Different scholars will no doubt choose different works as the earliest and most formative; but all will I think recognize that the interest in understanding forms of religious expression lay at the core of the sociological venture in its germinal years.

These early pioneers seem to have been searching mainly for new tools and devices for uncovering the laws of social organization. But their talents ran toward tools, not of measurement (although Durkheim's study of suicide

opened that path too), but tools for the perception of forms and patterns, not only in comparative studies but in explorations of single societies as well. Their writings are full of original and imaginative concepts and methods. One such is the device of studying what the French school (Durkheim, Mauss, etc.) called "morphologie sociale" through the examination of concrete expressions of a community's style of life, such as village layouts. This simple device was utilized brilliantly by Marcel Mauss and Henri Bauchat in their essay on eskimo life,[1] in which they demonstrate how the eskimos construct two entirely different kinds of village, corresponding to the two major seasons of the year and the two widely divergent kinds of activity common to each. But little has been done with this tool since. (We should note in passing, however, that an American anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, has in recent years done some very interesting work on social distance and the social uses of space.[2])

The special virtue of techniques of this kind is that they give us access to the intangible spirit or essence of a community via something concrete and tangible. For the study of religion, it means that we can get away momentarily from "what men say" (their theologies, their doctrines, their moral teachings), and examine "what men do": how they live, how their often unconscious self-image and aspirations shape their communities. Confucius (*Lun Yü* V, 9) notes with some regret that it is not enough to listen to "what men say"; one must also watch what they do. The sociologist glories in this complete view of man, and is most comfortable when he can begin with "what men do" (the survey sociologist to the contrary; but their contributions do not endure).

But before we can try out this Sociology of Forms, we must be certain that the community we wish to study fulfills certain conditions. One cannot simply pick up a map of the city of Tokyo, for example, and begin speculating on the social meaning of the spatial centrality of the palace grounds, and of the proximity to it of the banking, government, and mercantile districts. Ideally, the community we seek to understand through its tangible dwelling and working facilities should be a self-contained community, with a clearly understood (if not articulated) purpose; then we can examine its spatial morphology, and

---

1 "Essai sur les Variations saisonnières des Sociétés Eskimos: Essai de Morphologie sociale," *Année Sociologique*, v. IX (1906), pp. 39–132.

2 Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York, 1966).

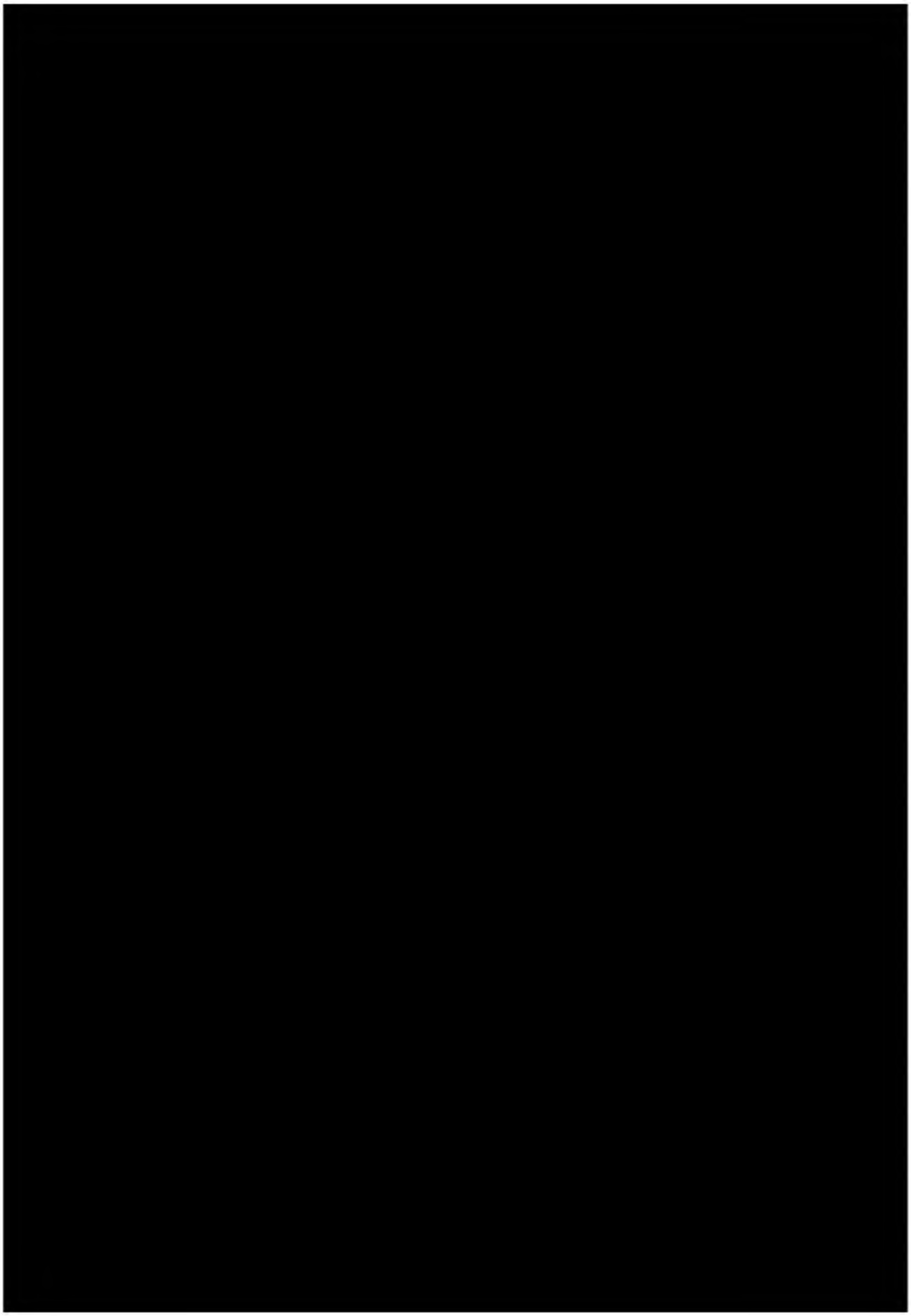
hopefully discern clues to the essential nature of the community and how it understands itself and its meaning in the world. It should ideally reside and do its work in a settlement (a village, a town, an aggregate of buildings) of its own making, so that the arrangement of its buildings will express the *idées directrices* of the community; that is what we mean by "self-contained."

It has long seemed to me that the ideal subject for a study of this kind would be the monastery, and its resident community of monks. On a visit to Japan some years ago, I made some notes toward a study of that kind, and wish to report here a few very tentative findings and reflections. It will of course not be possible to confine my remarks to establishments that are "purely monastic," as one might in a study of Catholic Christian monks, or perhaps Theravadin monks; for the *sangha* has taken many forms in Japan. We will be dealing here with temple-monastery enclosures, where monks live or come for a period of training, and where laymen come to meditate or to pray. The plan of these monastery-cum-temple complexes should tell us something about the religious life of both monks and laymen, and should also tell us something about how the religious concerns of the laity relate to the ideals of the *sangha;* for neither monastery nor temple can long flourish without the active concern, support and involvement of the laity. That was perhaps the point that King Milinda had overlooked when he asked the venerable Nagasena, "Why do the houseless ones build houses?"

## I

The subjects of our study are two temple-monasteries in the Rinzai Zen tradition, in the vicinity of the old city of Kamakura. We shall start with Engakuji (see Figure 1), whose wood frame structures are scattered along rambling pathways through the woods of a valley cradled among the hills north of Kamakura. Countess Iso Mutsu describes the site as "a gently rising valley enclosed by the rocky walls of the green hills, heavily shaded by majestic old trees and the feathery whispering of tall bamboo groves."[3] Strolling along the temple's main pathway, one enters first what appears to constitute an outer or lower complex of buildings, dominated by the main hall for veneration of the Buddha (*Butsuden*) and its companion structure, the *Sammon* or Triple Gate.

[3] *Kamakura, Fact and Legend* (Tokyo, 1930), p. 132.



Countess Iso Mutsu comments on the "austere simplicity of the mighty curves and gables of its thatched roof" as it stands in "the deep shadows of the lofty cedars."[4] *Sammon* is a contraction of *San-gedatsu-mon*, Gate of the Three Liberations.[5] It is a portal, a threshold to the world of the Engakuji, the world of the Lord Buddha and his blessed Path.

The *Butsuden* is of course the main image hall, housing, in this case, a somewhat battered fourteenth century image of the Buddha, done in the Chinese style. At the time of our first visit, some years ago, the *Butsuden* was undergoing reconstruction, and so the image had been temporarily moved into a smaller hall across the way. In front of the image was the customary wood coin box to receive the offerings of visitors and pilgrims. Adjoining the temporary worship hall was a stall for the sale of books by the abbot, and leaflets on the temple and on Zen teachings. Just beyond the temporary image hall is a somewhat secluded house and garden, available to lay guests of the temple who come to practice meditation.

All in all, our impression is that the buildings in this first or lower level complex, with the exception of the laymen's meditation hall (it formerly served as a hall for instruction in *kendō*, by the way), are for contact with pilgrims at the most elemental level, that of worship or veneration. In order to meet with the monastic residents of the temple, the visitor must penetrate deeper into the wooded valley, and climb the gentle slope to the next complex of buildings. Here he will find the temple office, classrooms and parlors, and a large and imposing preaching hall. Laymen come every Sunday to the preaching hall to hear a sermon and to practice Zen sitting. Adjoining the preaching hall are the classrooms; here one is apt to find, on a quiet afternoon, a class in Zen for businessmen in progress. The New York *Times* reported last year that something in the neighborhood of five thousand company men are sent to Engakuji each year for spiritual training, each group residing at the temple for three days or so. Companies mentioned include Nissan Motors, Fuji Film, and Japan Stationary (Pentel).[6] Next to the classrooms are a half dozen or so parlors, where

---

[4] *ibid.*, p. 135.

[5] A.L. Sadler, *A Short History of Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo, 1962), p. 40.

[6] "Japanese Zen Path to Business," The New York *Times*, July 26, 1967, pp. 49 and 57. The article included a photograph of Pentel trainees engaged in *zazen* at Engakuji.

laymen attending classes can relax over a cup of tea. Also within this complex stands the special gate reserved for the official envoy of the Emperor on ceremonial occasions, a reminder of imperial support of Buddhism in earlier times.

Emerging from this middle complex and continuing on up the gently sloping pathway, we pass, on the left, a scattering of hermitages for scholar-guests, hidden in the dense woods, including the former residence of the late Daisetz Suzuki. Passing the Lake of Sacred Fragrance—"oblong in shape, and bordered with ancient rocks"[7]—we come now to what we shall call the "upper complex," where the monks reside and receive their training. Dr. Suzuki himself, in his book *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, refers to this as "the higher and inner part of the grounds."[8] In his brief account of Engakuji, he speaks only of this complex, and makes no mention of the middle or lower levels of the monastery-temple.

The monastic or upper complex is divided into what we might loosely call an "outer cloister," which one enters through a gate off the main path, and an "inner cloister," entered through another gate. Within the inner cloister we find, directly before us, the *Shariden* or Buddha Relic Hall, often referred to as the gem of Engakuji. This *Shariden* is the most ancient building in Kamakura, and is in fact the only building that has been preserved intact from the Kamakura Period,[9] although it was badly damaged in the earthquake of 1923. It is said to house a tooth of the Lord Buddha, brought from China, along with images of Jizo and Kannon, which are also housed here. To the right of the relic hall is the *Zendo*, the hall where monks reside during their training period. Here they practice meditation, here they take their meals and their sleep, and here they puzzle over the *koan* given them by their Master. This hall is not open to laymen (it is cloistered). In it, each monk has his *tatami* mat, with a storage locker in front, for books, bedding, etc. About twenty-five monks live here, except during the summer vacation period. Next to the *Zendo*, but located in the outer yard, is the teaching hall for monks. To the left of the *Shariden* one finds (not indicated in the sketch, Figure 1) a cave-shrine to Benten, a storage house for the treasures of the community (*Hōzō*), the residence of the Master (*Inryō*),

---

[7] Countess Iso Mutsu, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[8] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (New York, 1959), p. 3.

[9] Countess Iso Mutsu, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

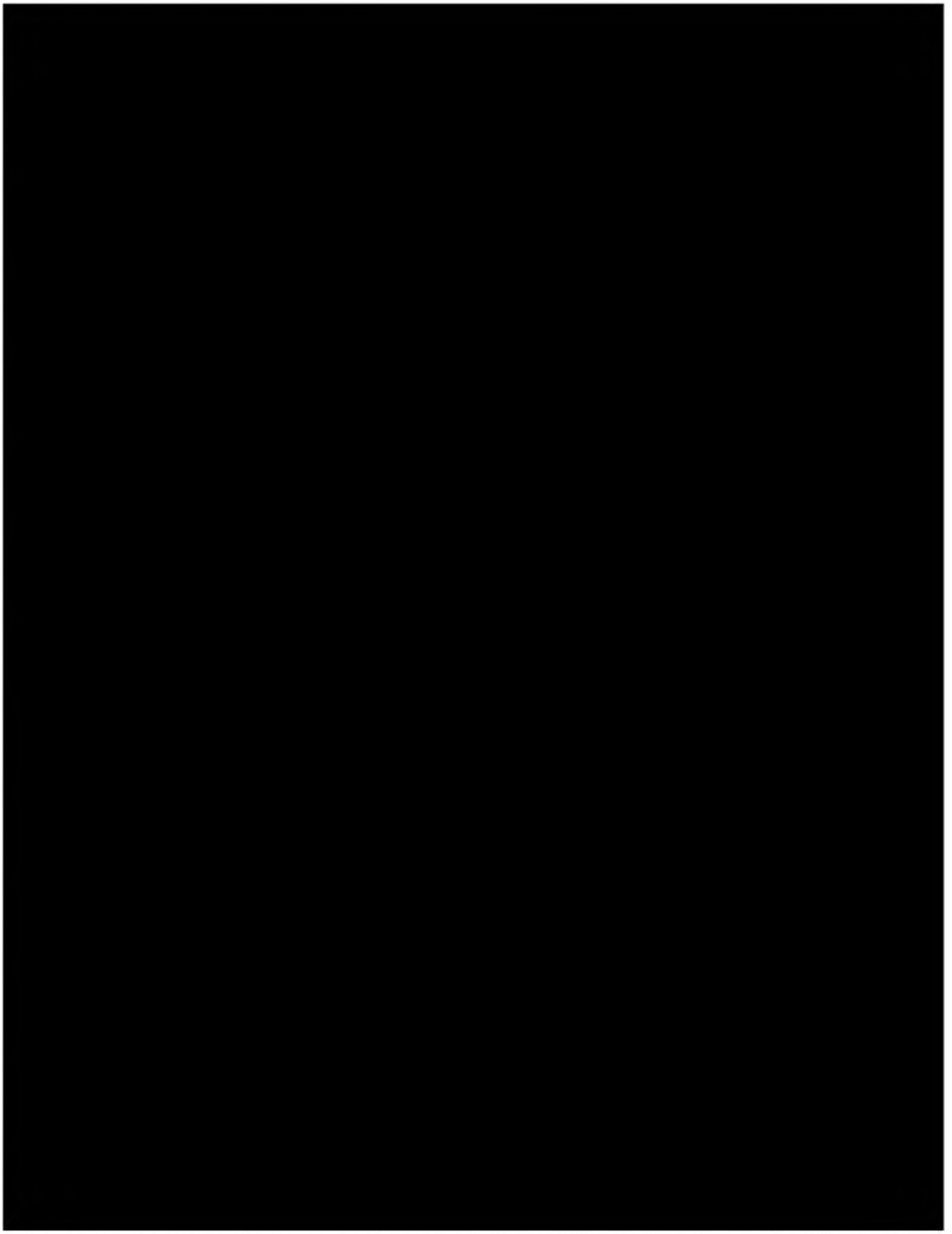
and the belfry. Behind the *Shariden* there is a tomb, that of the founder of the monastery, and a hall dedicated to him.

In a sense, the three levels of the Engakuji layout represent the Three Treasures of Buddhism. The lower level represents the Buddha, as an object of veneration. The middle level has to do with Dharma, and has for its focal point the Preaching Hall. It is at this level primarily that the *sangha* attempts to reach out and influence the layman's style of life, through preaching and, above all, through meditation, which is after all the essence of Buddhism. The upper level is the (temporary) home of the *sangha*, and as such it is the heart of the monastery. In the *Butsuden*, the monks are prepared to meet the layman at his level. In the middle ground, monks and laymen meet each other half-way. (*Zazen* and Pentel: the American journalist titters at such seemingly paradoxical combinations.) But the layman who would become truly and most fully a follower of the Path set down by the Buddha must go all the way, and live under the discipline. It is significant that in the Engakuji *Zendo*, along with the mats for monks, there are a few mats for laymen, who practice Zen sitting in the company of the monks.

## II

Kenchōji is another of the ancient temples of Kamakura. Its layout (see Figure 2) shows two distinct levels, with the monastic complex clearly elevated and removed from the lay complex. Within the lay complex, we would again appear to have two groupings of buildings, although they are much less clearly distinguished than at Engakuji. Entering through the outer gate, we follow a gently winding path along another of Kamakura's densely wooded valleys, to the *Sammon* or tower gate and, to its right, an ancient bronze bell. Beyond the *Sammon* is the *Butsuden* or image hall, housing a huge image of Jizo, and a number of lesser images and treasures. Beyond the image hall is the *Hatto*, the hall for lectures and instruction and for religious services. These buildings constitute the outer grouping, concerned essentially with the religion of the laity.

Continuing on and following the curve of the valley, we come to the special gate for the imperial messenger, which marks the entrance into the second grouping, which is dominated by a large hall called the Hall of Dragons (because it is so decorated). Buildings adjoining this large hall serve as the temple office, laymen's meditation hall, and so on. Within this second grouping there



is also a garden landscaped in the Chinese manner, the first of its kind in Japan and therefore quite famous as a model for other gardens of its kind. This second grouping fosters a deeper level of communication between layman and monk, and corresponds roughly to the middle complex at Engakuji.

Up the hill to the right of the outer grouping and effectively removed from it, in a quiet, secluded, forested area, is a separate complex, which includes a meditation hall for monks, a special hall dedicated to the founder of Kenchōji, a bell to call the community together, the *roshi's* house, and so on. At the *Zendo*, "a statue of Monju—typification of wisdom—faces the door: the floor is tiled, with raised and matted platforms for the priests and students, who in the attainment of their spiritual education sit there hour after hour, detached from the things of earth. . . ."[10] Like the *Shariden* at Engakuji, the Founder's Hall at Kenchōji is the focal point of the stillness of the monastic complex. It is a "large pillared hall of sacred aspect. Paved with stone, the whole floor is lightly flecked with moss of a pale emerald hue, and appears undefiled by the foot of man. . . . Four tall stands for candles, lacquered in dull vermilion, lend a striking note of color to the sombre interior: at the further end. . . are closed doors, before which stands a metal incense-burner of archaic design—a lamp above, that is never extinguished, diffusing a soft golden light upon the scene."[11] Here is the true home of silence and the monastic quest.

## III

Some years ago I came upon a quite delightful small volume by Van Meter Ames and his wife, entitled *Japan and Zen*, recounting their rather personal impressions and reflections on their year at a Soto Zen university in Tokyo. Two passages in particular caught my eye. In one, Ames (ostensibly discussing temple gates) says: "In the mass of the temple gate, like a black character brushed on the sky, the impact of Zen is felt. In the dark arch of the outer gate a small door of human size leads into a green enclosure, a garden, and another gate. A gate is not so much a barrier as an entrance, not to keep people out but to take them in."[12] The other passage reads: "If Zen is revived in Japan it will be

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119. [11] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[12] Van Meter Ames (with Betty Ames), *Japan and Zen* (Cincinnati, 1961), p. 34.

largely thanks to devoted laymen who have caught its living spirit more than the run of monks and priests. Many devotees of Zen go in spare time to the meditation hall; and gather on a Sunday after the morning service to have tea, in the ceremonial way, followed by earnest discussion with a master like Sogen Asahina of Engakuji. Enjoyable as this is, they realize that for it to be more than a privilege it must carry over into the working week. By their example and influence they quietly bring Zen out of its sheltered precincts . . . into the world."[13]

What Van Meter Ames has said here in these thoughtfully chosen words we can see stated, with almost comparable eloquence, in the groundplans of the two temples. For both speak of the "sheltered precincts" of the monastery-temple, and the hurly-burly of the world without. Both bespeak the need of the monastic ideal to draw people away from the world, toward these silent places; and of the reciprocal need of men, having captured the silence briefly, to return to the world with their prize—only to return again, and enter the gate, and be restored.

What we are saying here is not said about the Zen sect only, nor even exclusively of Buddhism in Japan. It is true wherever you find those whom Max Weber called religious virtuosi: whether they be Muslim dervishes, or Christian monks, or Theravadin *bhikkhus*, or Hindu *sadhaks*. For wherever the life of discipline is lived, there you will probably find a special community, gathered into themselves like a spiritual family. And there too you will find the laity, seeking their *darshan*, their wisdom, or some "earnest discussion" after tea. Or perhaps seeking simply a place to worship; a place where they feel the holy is present. Perhaps they have come only to gaze upon the tranquil eyes of a bronze Bodhisattva; it is no matter. The gate, as Ames says, is there to draw them in, and then, gradually, to draw them toward the style of life of the historical Buddha and his community: the life of meditation, "the silent life," as Thomas Merton called it. And so here we have, within the sacred precincts, three worlds, three levels at which the religious life can be lived: at the top, meditation; at the bottom, veneration; and in the middle, the meeting ground, where the silent life draws the layman upward.

I do not mean to suggest, of course, that one will find these three levels of

---

[13] *ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

the religious life reflected in the morphology of every temple in Japan. I cite Engakuji and Kenchōji simply because the pattern is clear and striking there. But I do believe that, because Buddhism is a religion of meditation, and every priest inherits the tradition of the *sangha* and is a little withdrawn from the world; and because the temple he maintains draws the laity to venerate the Buddha's insight and compassion within the temple compound; the two worlds of worship and discipline cannot help but meet in those precincts, and their convergence and interplay be manifest there.